

Upper State Street Community Development Corporation

471 Wilbraham Road
Springfield, MA. 01109

February 5, 2013

Community Development Dept.
City of Springfield
36 Court Street
Springfield, MA. 01103

Re: Need for Serious Change in
Direction in CDBG Programs

Dear Sirs;

We are the non-profit community organization representing the Upper State Street Community, which includes the historic Old Hill, Upper Hill, McKnight Bay Area, and Pine Point Communities of Springfield.

I am writing to respond to your request for comments relative to your proposed use of HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and related resources for the coming year. I had wished to attend the hearing held at the Rebecca Johnson School, but could not due to work commitments. I am therefore submitting these written comments.

As a brief synopsis of our response, we disapprove of the way funds have been used in recent years, and we therefore disapprove of the proposed general continuation of the programs now active that appears to be your intent, based on the list of activities you listed in your flyer, beginning with "Code Enforcement".

Code Enforcement, in particular, we feel should not continue to be supported as it has been in recent years. This is because what has evolved is a sort of 'Goon squad' of inspectors who are subsidized by HUD to descend on unlucky property owners whose main offense is that they are unpopular with some City agency or City-funded "Citizens group", with the result that wildly-exaggerated "Inspection reports" are used to justify court procedures, condemnation, and evictions. Many, many people have been made homeless. We do not feel that this is a positive use of HUD resources.

In fact there seems to be a tendency for those targeted to be members of minority groups or people who rent rooms to members of minority groups. Several HUD Title VIII discrimination complaints have been filed relative to these activities, and there really should be a full review of the fair housing implications before the Mayor is asked to sign another fair housing certification of a CDBG program that contains this approach to improving our "Quality of life".

We also do not feel that either CDBG or HOME resources should be used to subsidize the efforts of out-of-town builders like HAP, Inc. to construct assisted housing in place of actual owner-occupied and conventional rental housing. We have enough assisted housing in our inner neighborhoods, if not too much in many areas, and what is needed is support for existing market-rate housing, and support for new market-rate housing where needed to balance the assisted housing where it has been overbuilt.

As an alternative we would strongly urge the City to make two programs the focus of CDBG activity in the coming year:

- A.) Housing rehab and Restoration: The City should return to the housing rehab program as a primary focus, including restoration of houses of period architectural design; and
- B.) Ending the Foreclosure Crisis: While the rest of the country is seeing a "Housing recovery" our inner neighborhoods are still being flooded with foreclosures. The City should use a major portion of the HUD resources to address these issues. We would advocate using both

the "Anti-Foreclosure Ordinance" that was passed by the City Council and upheld in Federal Court as a tool to preserve families in their homes and persuade banks to re-write mortgages, and at the same time work to pass the bill State Reps. Swan and Coakley-Rivera have filed which could end the whole problem by rebuilding our local banking system in our "Historic Districts". The so-called 'Big Banks' may work well for some places, but Springfield is not one of them and the City should not allow these institutions to intimidate it into failing to address the needs of our communities.

In addition we would like to see support provided for capacity building for local economic development organizations like Upper State Street and other CDCs, and for survey efforts to list all the historic properties that have been omitted from the National and State Registers of Historic Places because the effort has not been made in minority-dominated neighborhoods.

We would also not mind seeing support provided, as has been suggested by others, for rebuilding some of the historic houses that were improperly demolished following the 2011 tornado; just because people made errors in judgement is no reason Springfield should suffer through the coming generations.

We would be happy to work with officials of your Department to work out details of programs such as we have suggested. Please do not hesitate to be in touch

Sincerely yours,

Glenrose Tamesar

Glenrose Tamesar
President

Cc: Springfield City Council
All members
file

McKnight CDC

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35 Florida Street
Springfield, MA. 01109

January 28, 2012

Community Development Department
City of Springfield
36 Court Street
Springfield, MA. 01103

Re: Thoughts on CDBG Activities

Dear Sirs:

Thank you for notifying us of this opportunity to comment on projected CDBG activities for the upcoming year.

As before we feel that the priorities of the City's use of funds in the past two decades or so have been misguided. While the program was not perfect from 1974 through 1990 it was much more focused on community improvement and empowerment, where in recent years we have seen too many resources used for inspections and prosecution of people whose primary fault is that they need the resources to improve their property.

These resources, instead of being used for rehab and preservation loans and grants, as many millions of dollars were in the 1970s and 1980s, are being appropriated for "Code enforcement" and demolition, as well as for subsidizing outside developers and groups to do what Springfield people could be doing.

We could as well have said they have been "Misappropriated", but we don't want to go there.


What we would like is for "Code enforcement", instead of being first on the list of activities, to be deleted, and to be replaced with "Historic preservation", because we have a huge backlog in all the CDBG Target neighborhoods, and this should be followed by "Historic reconstruction", because there have been a lot of houses and buildings torn down that should not have been, especially in the areas hit by

the tornado, and we should use the \$6 million coming from HUD, or whatever amount is available, to reconstruct the heritage of Springfield that was lost due to mismanagement by City agencies.

Working with local community organizations this would allow training of neighborhood young people in traditional construction methods, and could allow capacity-building for local community groups as well.

At the same time we continue to feel that the City should be working with neighborhood residents and organizations to building local autonomy generally, and in particular to promote affirmative marketing of housing in City neighborhoods so that there is a more economically balanced population moving into Springfield to build a stronger community for the future.

Sincerely yours,


Eli Colgram
President

cc: City Council members
Open Housing
file